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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000148

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT'S AMBASSADOR TO IRAQ EXPRESSES FRUSTRATION
AND DISAPPOINTMENT

REF: KUWAIT 125

Classified By: Political Counselor Pete O'Donohue for reasons 1.4 b and
d

¶1. (C) Summary: Kuwait's Ambassador to Baghdad has expressed strong frustration over his inability to get the Iraqis to treat him or the range of bilateral issues with the seriousness that a normal state-to-state relationship should warrant. Iraqi insistence on treating all issues as part of a "package," combined with the experience of finding that the results of positive meetings with the Iraqi MFA are subsequently undercut by other sectors of the GOI, have added to the frustration. Asserting that other ambassadors are better treated than he, Kuwait's ambassador has questioned the seriousness of Iraq's intention to conduct meaningful bilateral relations. End Summary.

Focus on Humanitarian Activities

¶2. (C) DCM and POLCOUNS on February 15 called on Ali Al-Mou'min, Kuwait's Ambassador to Iraq, at his headquarters at the Humanitarian Operations Center (HOC), a GOK-supported facility engaged in medical and reconstruction assistance in Iraq. Al-Mou'min ran the HOC for several years prior to becoming Ambassador in October 2008 and continues to manage it now. Al-Mou'min returned this week from an extended medical check-up in the UK (which he announced went well) and plans to spend several days in Kuwait prior to returning to Baghdad on February 23. The always cordial and effervescent Al-Mou'min opened the meeting with a discussion of his plans to mark Kuwait's National Day in Baghdad on February 25 at his mission's temporary facilities at the Rasheed Hotel, an event that he said would feature an exhibition on the HOC's humanitarian activities in Iraq. Al-Mou'min said that -- given the long involvement of the U.S. military in HOC operations -- he would be in touch with Embassy Baghdad to explore whether an AMCIT with experience in humanitarian operations could participate in the event to highlight the cooperative nature of this activity. Al-Mou'min added that his wife, who has also been active in humanitarian activities, will accompany him to Baghdad for National Day, at the suggestion of Ambassador Crocker. DCM noted it will be positive for the GOK to highlight its assistance to the Iraqi people.

Frustration Over Endless Obstacles

¶3. (C) Al-Mou'min segued from discussion of Kuwait's humanitarian activities into a frank conversation about the frustration and disappointment he has experienced in dealing with the Iraqis during his brief tenure as Ambassador. Commenting that he is now in the position of questioning whether the Iraqis "really want to solve their bilateral

problems with Kuwait," Al-Mou'min characterized his relationship with the GOI as consisting of "good meetings, but few results." Echoing comments that the Iraqi charge in Kuwait offered recently (reftel), Al-Mou'min noted that he regularly has good meetings with the Iraqi MFA, but then "someone else" in the government creates obstacles. Adding to his frustration, Al-Mou'min said, is the Iraqi penchant for treating all discussions on the bilateral relationship as something to be resolved "as a package" rather than item by item. This approach, he suggested, renders meaningful progress "hard". Adding to Al-Mou'min's frustration, he said, is the difficulty of getting the GOI to act even in its own interest, and even at Kuwaiti expense. He noted, as an example, that Kuwait has long set aside money for the GOI to use for humanitarian activities, but has had little success in convincing the GOI to come up with a plan for using the money. At present, the money remains in an account, unused and losing value. Al-Mou'min also expressed frustration over encroachment by Iraqis onto Kuwaiti-owned properties in Basra, including the Kuwaiti consulate. (Note: While Al-Mou'min said he was aware of a February 5 meeting, described reftel, between Iraqi MFA Undersecretary Hamoud and Kuwaiti MFA Undersecretary Jarallah that supposedly produced progress on a number of bilateral issues, he seemed unaware that the Basra issue was discussed. End Note.)

Perception of Discrimination

14. (C) Al-Mou'min also complained about what he perceived as discriminatory treatment of him, as a Kuwaiti, that he said is not experienced by ambassadors from other countries,

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including Arab countries like Egypt and Bahrain. For example, Al-Mou'min said he continues to have enormous difficulties moving official goods from the airport to the Rasheed Hotel and is forced to rely on expensive "mediators" to get things done. Al-Mou'min said Iraqi FM Zebari had promised him that he would be well-looked after as Kuwait's Ambassador, but this has not happened. Adding fuel to Al-Mou'min's frustration was a decision by the GOI to turn over to a relative of the FM a residential villa that Al-Mou'min said had been promised to him, offering him instead a residence in poor condition that would require expensive repairs.

Limited Signs of Progress

15. (C) On a somewhat more optimistic note, Al-Mou'min suggested that a January 21 meeting between Kuwait's Amir and Iraqi President Talibani that had (supposedly -- see reftel) resulted in Kuwait reducing its claim for damages on behalf of Kuwait Airways from USD 1.3 billion to USD 300 million had "made the Iraqis happy" and injected some positive energy into the bilateral relationship. Al-Mou'min also acknowledged that the February 5 session between Kuwaiti MFA U/S Jarallah and Iraqi MFA U/S Hamoud had made progress on long-festering issues concerning compensation, borders, improvement of a border crossing point, and the removal of encroaching Iraqi farmers although, as noted above, he did not appear aware of details. Queried by DCM and POLCOUNS on several specific items, Al-Mou'min said he had seen few signs of interest among Iraqis in bolstering sales of Iraqi farm products in Kuwait. Concerning the status of Kuwait's missing national archives, Al-Mou'min said the Iraqis have told him they have no information or idea of their whereabouts. Al-Mou'min said he has also had discussions with the GOI's Ministry of Human Rights about the status of Kuwaitis who went missing during Saddam Hussain's invasion. The Iraqi response, he said, is that they have only a few teams trained to perform searches and that the task, given the vast number of Iraqi missing, is overwhelming. Al-Mou'min noted the GOI said it would be interested Kuwaiti support for additional training and Al-Mou'min has passed that on to the GOK.

¶6. (C) Comment: Clearly, the Kuwait-Iraq bilateral relationship is an affair of fits and starts. The several high-level Iraqi visits in January-February (reftel) provided some momentum to the relationship, but as almost all Kuwaiti officials appear to recognize, the day-by-day effort on the ground of moving the relationship forward in concrete, measurable terms will be tedious and arduous. Kuwaitis acknowledge the difficulties Iraqis are having in getting their bureacratic house in order, and understand that these internal problems contribute to the difficulty of resolving bilateral issues; but they also remain concerned, at every level, that Iraqi foot-dragging is equally motivated by a continuing inability to accept that Kuwait is a separate and sovereign country, and that a positive bilateral relationship would benefit both countries. End Comment.

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